

A Brief Description of the Program in Human Biology

The Program in Human Biology was founded nine years ago by a group of faculty who were convinced that some curricular fusion between biology and the related social science disciplines was essential. A five-year grant from the Ford Foundation supported the Program initially. It is now on general University support like regular Departments, but unlike them it has no faculty of its own. The faculty, recruited from among those interested in the multidisciplinary approach, are from various departments of the University, including the Medical School.

Human Biology is an interdepartmental curriculum which interlaces the social and biological sciences in the study of man. The Program is designed for the education of individuals with a wide range of potential interests: e.g. careers in law, government, public health, policy science, or in medicine, especially with a behavioral, social or public policy emphasis. It is also appropriate for those interested in graduate study in disciplines that are directed toward the biology of man. Because of its multidisciplinary focus, the Program provides its majors with career planning assistance.

The programs in Human Biology and Biological Sciences are respectively the third largest and the second largest undergraduate programs of concentration at Stanford; together they account for nearly one fifth of each graduating class. In general, those whose primary interests are directed towards a professional career in one of the life sciences will be best advised to enter the Biological Sciences with its emphasis on the straightforward scientific content of that discipline.

The initial clientele of the Program was varied. Some were pre-medical students who wanted an undergraduate education that gave more attention to some of the social issues surrounding health-care problems. Some were biologists whose orientation was especially towards psychology, sociobiology and the like; they found the Program's emphasis on these areas appealing. Still others were interested in the possibility of using combined training in the biological and social sciences to attack the increasing number of societal problems that have a heavy biological content.

These kinds of students are still with us, and many more. The focus of the Program has broadened to more formally include the third category however, and several of the upper division courses reflect the "public policy" emphasis. Two new one-quarter courses on science and policy have appeared, one on health related issues and the other on environmental related issues. We thus expect to increase our emphasis on those social sciences that are critical to policy analysis, like economics. In this way we can provide the best scientific background for looking at the major public policy questions of the present and the future that have a large biological component -- for example, the tradeoff between agricultural production and environmental quality, the evaluation of risk associated with chemicals added to food or to the environment, population policies, priorities in health-care research, the risks and benefits of recombinant DNA research, abortion and fetal research, the design of international agreements about marine resource exploitation, and so on.

Because of its multidisciplinary focus and its organization as a curricular program rather than a department, the Program has an extensive advising system coordinated by a Director of Advising and Career Planning. The primary job of the student

advisors is to help students plan and develop their academic programs, to shed light on course options and to be a communications link (for complaints, suggestions, etc.) between students and faculty. The advisors' backgrounds span many fields and students are encouraged to talk to an advisor whose interests correspond with their own. A faculty advisor supervises each area of concentration (i.e. natural sciences, behavioral sciences or policy sciences) that Human Biology majors can select. Last year the Program began assisting students in defining their career goals and expectations. This will be continued by holding small group discussions in career planning, and by providing individual counseling.